

~~SECRET~~  
SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

6 March 1953

SE-39: Probable Consequences of the Death of Stalin  
(Revised)

1. The problem of transfer of authority from Stalin is one of the most difficult which the Soviet system could face. We believe that this transfer will be initially effected in an orderly manner, and that there will be no immediate external evidence of dissension within the ruling group of the USSR. Authority is now being exercised in the name of the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers. However, Malenkov's key position in the Party, his conspicuous and apparently planned elevation since 1948, and his prominent role at and since the 19th Party Congress suggest that he will be the most powerful figure for the immediate future.

2. We cannot estimate whether Malenkov has the qualities necessary to consolidate his position and to attain unchallenged power, since he has always operated with the backing of Stalin. Neither is it possible to estimate with confidence the capabilities or probable courses of action of his possible opponents.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~SECRET~~

A struggle for power could develop within the Soviet hierarchy at any time. Given the nature of the Soviet state, such a struggle probably would be carried on within the Party organization. In any case the peoples of the USSR are unlikely to participate actively in the struggle, and the hold of the Communist Party over the USSR is not likely to be shaken.

3. The death of Stalin removes an autocrat who, while ruthless and determined to spread Soviet power, did not allow his ambitions to lead him into reckless courses of action in his foreign policy. In the near future, the new Soviet leadership will almost certainly attempt to follow the foreign and domestic policies established during recent years. It is probable that in the execution of these policies, the successors to Stalin will have less freedom of action in the event of crisis. Specifically, in foreign policy, the successors would probably find it more difficult to abandon positions than did Stalin. It would be unsafe to assume that his successor, or successors, will have his skill in avoiding a direct collision with the West.

- 2 -

~~SECRET~~  
 CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

4. The death of Stalin removes not only the dictator of the Soviet Union, but the undisputed leader of World Communism. For some time, no successor can achieve comparable status or similar significance as a symbol of the world-wide movement. Therefore, at least temporarily, the cohesion of the world Communist movement will probably be impaired. If there should be a struggle for power within the Soviet Communist Party, this struggle would almost certainly spread to the Communist Parties outside the Bloc.

5. Kremlin control over the Satellites is so firm that we do not believe it will be impaired by the death of Stalin. However, in the unlikely event that a struggle in the Soviet Communist Party should spread to the Soviet Army and the Soviet security forces, Soviet control over the Satellites would almost certainly be shaken.

6. Relations between Tito and Moscow are unlikely to change as a result of the death of Stalin. The antagonism was not purely personal, but arose from a genuine clash of Yugoslav national interests with the Soviet Communist Party. Moreover, both sides have taken action and adopted positions which would be extremely difficult to reverse. The Kremlin could not recognize Tito as an independent Communist ally without undermining its position in the European Satellites.

- 3 -

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ CONFIDENTIAL

**CONFIDENTIAL**

7. Tito's prestige and influence with fellow-travellers, particularly in Western Europe, may expand with the death of Stalin. We do not believe that Tito's influence within the Satellites will increase, unless there should be a prolonged struggle for power in the USSR.

8. We believe that Stalin's death will have no immediate effect upon Sino-Soviet cooperation or upon Chinese Communist foreign policies. However, no successor to Stalin will have prestige and authority in Asia comparable to his. The stature of Mao as leader and theoretician of Asiatic Communism will inevitably increase with the disappearance of the former supreme leader. Mao will almost certainly claim more influence in the determination of Bloc policy affecting Asia, but he will not seek or obtain leadership of the international Communist movement. The new Moscow leadership will probably deal cautiously with Mao; if it does not, serious strains in Sino-Soviet relations will almost certainly develop.

9. We believe that in general the Western European leaders will be disposed to conduct the East-West struggle with greater hesitancy and caution. They will probably fear that any Western pressure on the Bloc would increase the danger of war and facilitate the stabilization of authority in the USSR. They will also

- 4 -

**CONFIDENTIAL**

~~SECRET~~  
CONFIDENTIAL

probably hope that, if Western pressure is not exerted, the problems involved in the transfer of authority in the USSR will bring about at least a temporary relaxation of tensions and enable them to postpone disagreeable policy decisions.

CONFIDENTIAL  
~~SECRET~~